United Nations A/C.5/56/SR.17

General Assembly
Fifty-sixth session

Official Records

Distr.: General
31 October 2001

Original: English

## Fifth Committee

**Summary record of the 17th meeting**
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Thursday, 25 October 2001, at 10 a.m.

*Chairman:* Mr. Effah-Apenteng ..... (Ghana)
*Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions:* Mr. Mselle

## Contents

Agenda item 124: Pattern of conferences (*continued*)

Other matters

This record is subject to correction. Corrections should be sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned *within one week of the date of publication* to the Chief of the Official Records Editing Section, room DC2-750, 2 United Nations Plaza, and incorporated in a copy of the record.

Corrections will be issued after the end of the session, in a separate corrigendum for each Committee.

01-60263 (E)

*The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.*

**Agenda item 124: Pattern of conferences** (*continued*) (A/56/32, A/56/120/Rev.1, A/56/133, A/56/188, A/56/213 and Corr.1, A/56/261, A/56/277, A/56/293, A/56/299, A/56/300, A/56/339 and A/56/475; A/AC.198/2001/8)

1. **Mr. Iossifov** (Russian Federation) said that joint efforts must be made by the Secretariat and the Member States, on an agreed basis, to make the best possible use of conference-servicing resources. To that end, conference services must be coordinated among the various departments of the Organization and among the secretariats of United Nations bodies and other international organizations. The Committee on Conferences played a valuable role in that regard.

2. His delegation was prepared to approve the draft calendar of conferences and meetings for 2002-2003, taking into account the observations of the Committee on Conferences. He was pleased to note that the draft calendar reflected the arrangements referred to in General Assembly resolutions 53/208 A, 54/248 and 55/222 concerning the observance of Orthodox Good Friday. He was also pleased that the 2000 utilization factor for the United Nations offices in New York, Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi overall had exceeded the benchmark of 80 per cent and that the factor for Nairobi had increased significantly. He hoped that the utilization factor for 2001 would show still greater improvement.

3. His delegation noted with satisfaction that, between July 2000 and June 2001, the percentage of meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States which had been provided with interpretation services had risen to 90 per cent. Since the smooth functioning of sessional bodies was extremely important in order to enable the Organization to implement its programmes and mandates effectively, priority in the provision of conference services must be given to bodies established under the Charter or by mandate.

4. His delegation remained concerned about the late issuance of documentation. In some cases, the Fifth Committee had had to adjust its programme of work as a result of that chronic problem. He supported the recommendation of the Committee on Conferences that the Secretary-General should develop an effective accountability and responsibility system within the Secretariat to ensure the timely submission of documents for processing. Despite the established rules on the use of the official languages of the United Nations, the Member States did not always enjoy equal treatment in terms of the quality and quantity of translation and interpretation in those languages. His delegation would seek to ensure the adequate use of Russian and strict compliance with the principle of the parity of the six official languages. Effective action must be taken, particularly in the area of human resources, to improve translation and interpretation at the United Nations. His delegation had observations to make concerning the quality of translation into Russian and interpretation from Russian into English.

5. The Committee on Conferences had adopted a series of important recommendations concerning the recruitment of language staff. He reaffirmed his delegation's position that, without a radical change in the Organization's staffing policies, involving the establishment of a system of selection and rotation of staff that regularly brought in conscientious, well-qualified interpreters and translators conversant with contemporary language, the output of the interpretation and translation services would not improve. He agreed with the Committee on Conferences that a comprehensive review should be conducted of the norms and standards of productivity in the language services in the light of ongoing technological innovations in their work.

6. He welcomed the re-engineering of the optical disk system. It was important that users should be able to search for United Nations documents using any of the six official languages. However, he was seriously concerned about the widening disparity between English and the other official languages in the development and content of the United Nations web site. Unfortunately, the Secretariat had not made any serious efforts to develop proposals to redress that situation, as requested by the General Assembly. Practical measures were needed to address that violation of the principle of parity among the official languages of the United Nations.

7. With respect to the relevant section of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2002-2003, and in line with the relevant recommendations of the Committee on Conferences and the Committee for Programme and Coordination, he asked the Secretariat to provide information on the amount and distribution of temporary assistance in conference services, as well

as proposals on the conversion of some temporary assistance funds into established posts in the language services since that would lead to higher quality and budgetary savings. At the current session, the Fifth Committee should consider the possibility of strengthening the oversight and monitoring functions of the Committee on Conferences to enhance its effectiveness and strengthen its role as a subsidiary organ of the General Assembly.

**Other matters**

8. **Mr. Elgammal** (Egypt) proposed that, since the Committee had decided not to discuss the different sections of the proposed programme budget for 2002-2003 at its formal meetings, the Programme Planning and Budget Division should prepare a summary of the debates held in informal consultations so that delegations would have a record of the views expressed.

*The meeting rose at 10.30 a.m.*